DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 026 909 FL 001 132

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Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association.
Pub Date Apr 65
Note-3p.
Journal Cit-The Bulletin of the Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association; v43 n2 p93-95 Apr 1965.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.25
Descriptors-Audiovisual Aids, Instructional Materials, *Language Laboratories, *Language Laboratory Equipment, *Language Laboratory Use, Language Programs, *Modern Languages, Physical Design Needs, Program Planning, *Reference Materials, Second Language Learning, Tape Recordings, Textbooks

A general survey of U.S. schools and universities in 1965 suggests that 50 percent of them do not feature proper language laboratory facilities. Aimed at prospective laboratory buyers and those seeking equipment replacements, the article analyzes the laboratory's mechanical aspects, accessible locations, physical facilities and equipment arrangement, uses of audiovisual aids, program planning, and decision making, all in terms of users' needs. A list of standard texts on language laboratories is provided, and there is a sketch of a proposed laboratory. (DS)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

SOME BROADER HINTS ON ESTABLISHING A LANGUAGE LABORATORY

From: The Bulletin of the Penn. State MLA;
Vol. 43, No. 2, April 1965.

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At this moment in the history of the language laboratory as a teaching aid, it seems almost anachronistic to be talking about planning and installing this language learning complex.* But despite the years of experience and success of the laboratory, and the open support and financial backing of the U. S. government, more than 50% of the schools in the United States are without this important language learning situation. Though in general, this lack of a laboratory applies to small schools and colleges, many of them private, there are some long-established and respected schools that are still without a lab.

Of course, some schools are now operating with their second, third or fourth lab. While some have added labs to take care of expansion, many have discarded their original labs. This has occurred for a number of reasons: through sheer total hours of use, through misuse, vandalism, obsolescence, as well as the desire to have equipment with more prestige value.

Naturally, those schools which have had a lab have hopefully learned some of the wonderful lessons of experience. They will have some firm ideas on how to proceed and how to avoid making the same kinds of mistakes. Quite often they will be determined to change the brand of the lab equipment to be installed. Fortunately, a number of the language laboratory "pioneers" are no longer in existence. Many of these early manufacturers were dependent upon units and parts from a number of other manufacturers. Today there seems to be no advantage to claim that the lab is made up of parts from various and sometimes now non-existent producers of lab equipment. The desire to make such claims no doubt represents the kind of pride manifested by the hi-fi buff who constructs a unit made up of component parts and then speaks intelligently and enthusiastically about a solid state stereophonic amplifier by "X" and an ultrasensitive high compliance magnetic cartridge by "Y." This makes wonderful conversation and is great as a hobby. But we as language teachers belong to a language teaching profession. Let's leave the purely technical to the experts. In most cases, language teachers, as dedicated as they may be, should probably be given a "don't do it yourself kit" when they embark on the establishment of a lab.

In the last few years, especially since the launching of Sputnik in 1957 and passage of the NDEA of the following year, the language teaching situation has changed considerably. It is more than a matter of new techniques (of which there are many), increased use of teaching aids, and increased language proficiency on the part of language teachers. All of these are of capital importance, but also there has occurred a change of attitude, a new pride, within the profession. Just as important, the language teacher is taking a new role within the academic community. The language teacher is not now a weak and impoverished sister feeling inferior to his colleagues as he perhaps once did. He no longer has to ask to borrow the English department's well-worn phonograph, or wait hopefully to inherit the decrepit slide projector from the science department. He most probably has at his call and command, or can have, the most modern piece of equipment: the tape recorder, record player, the opaque or overhead projector. Certainly the language laboratory complex can include all of these teaching adjuncts. The lab can in fact be built to have all these features designed into it, or can be designed for their eventual inclusion.

In any school situation, the language lab should represent an important part of the teaching program and, as a physical entity, occupy a dominant and accessible location. One cannot suppose that the lab will take precedence over all other activities and considerations, and rare indeed would be the case in which the lab could be wholly designed from the very begin-

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* This is perhaps the reason for using a title that talks about establishing a language laboratory, which is much more than just planning or installing one. This article is reprinted from **RCA Learning Laboratory Planning Aids (PA-1) 1965.** It is the first in a series of three. Prof. Edberg is at the Univ. of Pittsburgh on leave from Dickinson College where he has been the Language Laboratory Director.

ning, from scratch, as it were. Probably the space will be inherited from some other activity (but not like the slide projector was), or other restrictions might be imposed by already established factors. But usually the difficulties are not impossible or the resultant problems insurmountable.

The most important thing is seeing to it that the location within the educational complex is generally favorable, that the surrounding environment is good, that the area be ample enough to allow flexibility in the lab activities, and also, if possible, that it allow for future expansion.

The planner should not be hampered by out-dated thinking. There is no reason why the seats must be arranged in certain groups or numbers in conventional classroom manner. Nor must the lab be set up in a conventional classroom arrangement with teacher and console up front. It may be that the console should be on the side of the lab with the teacher looking down the rows. Edward M. Stack suggests the placement of the console and monitor in the rear of the learning area.

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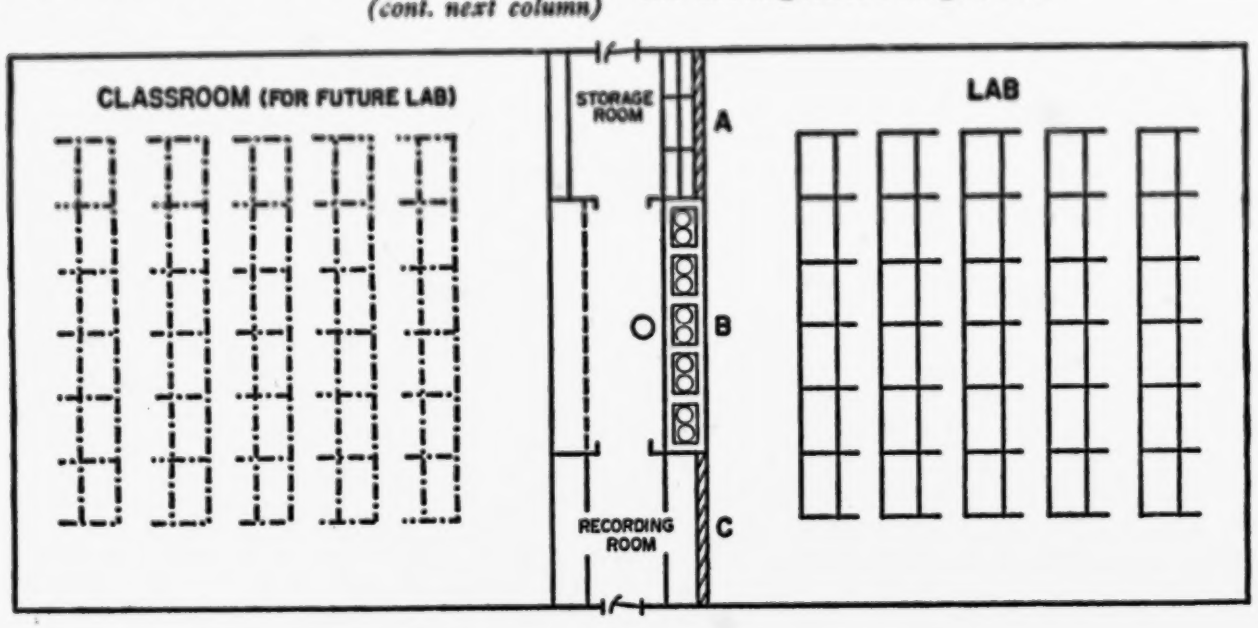
In any case, with the increased school population, an expanding language enrollment and the unprecedented growth in schools' physical plants, a lab should be built to be flexible. It should be in a location and of a size to allow the adding of student positions. If a room is designed with space planned for expansion, the addition of positions should result in adding rows of booths at the back or front of the lab, not one booth to the end of each row. With most equipment, such a practice would involve a greater wiring problem. It may also be very wise to select a place and to design the lab installation in such a way as to permit a second lab to be built adjoining the existing one.

The same electrical outlets would probably be available. Moreover, the same controls and the same operator could conceivably handle the second lab. A possible lab arrangement might be:



There should be other areas of flexibility in the lab rationale, of course. It hardly seems necessary to mention that a lab should be outfitted and geared to handle programs from a variety of sources: tapes—both master and student—records, and short-wave radio broadcasts. One other possibility is using the sound-track of a movie. Whether a school has the equipment,—or just the future potential for showing films, slides, film strips,—the lab should be so designed as to allow the eventual showing of filmed materials.

There are good reasons for the previous suggestion. For one, there are at the present time a number of language programs which are on film — with tapes. Moreover, more and more commercial films are being produced with foreign language tracks. Also filmed material can help solve scheduling problems (a point which will be explained in a future article).

The use of films, film strips or slides in the lab would necessitate a wall area for projection. In the preceding diagram of the lab, a portion of the wall to the side of the console (A or C) would probably

be sufficient. Or the console area could be set off-center to allow a larger area on one side for projecting pictures. Or a screen might be placed above the heavy plate glass window which would then cover the same area (B).

The projection of visuals on the front wall would seem to favor a placement of the console to the rear of the lab. Actually such an arrangement does not rule out the possibility for expansion (as shown on the diagram). The two labs, the existing one and the projected one, would then be placed back to back. The showing of films would also make a tiered, amphitheatre-like arrangement helpful, though by no means obligatory. Finding a location with tiers or an incline would, of nature, restrict one's choices. And to build such a room would involve a great outlay of money.

Any decision about the lab, whether a first lab, a replacement lab, or an additional lab, should not be hastily made. Those making the decision should be prudent and informed; their deliberations thoughtful. They should be familiar with the literature on the laboratory, be aware of hints on the installation—hints which are more specific than those I am supplying in this article. The planning aids and planning kits prepared by good language lab producers constitute a valuable source for this kind of information.

Those individuals involved in establishing a language laboratory should also be familiar with the standard texts: Edward M. Stack's *The Language Laboratory and Modern Language Teaching*, Fernand Marty's *Language Laboratory Learning*, Alfred S. Hayes' *Language Laboratory Facilities*, and *Sound Language Teaching* by James S. Holton, Paul E. King, Gustave Mathieu and Karl S. Pond. The most recent text to treat this all-important teaching aid is Elton Hocking's *Language Laboratory and Language Learning*. This text, which differs from the others, has its emphasis importantly on the lab's educational functions rather than its mechanical aspects. Theodore Huebener's *Audio-Visual Techniques in Teaching Foreign Languages* devotes the entire Chapter VII to the language laboratory and should be consulted.

Most of the general foreign language learning texts include discussions of the role of the language laboratory. Edward A. Méras' *A Language Teacher's Guide* has fewer references to the lab than do most texts, but it is, as the author himself recognizes, more a handbook for teachers than a book of methodology. Nelson Brooks' *Language and Language Learning*, which like Méras' text is also now out as a second edition, has Chapter 14 devoted to the language laboratory. Robert Lado's recent *Language Teaching: A Scientific Approach* devotes somewhat less to the language laboratory, but a portion of Part III called "Technological Aids" does deal with the lab. A number of journals and publications such as *The Modern Language Journal*, *Hispania*, *Audiovisual Instruction*, *International Journal of American Linguistics* should be consulted, for they often contain articles about the language laboratory.

In most situations, a number of people will be involved in planning for the laboratory. To achieve the most effective results, this committee should be kept as small as possible. The directing force in the committee should be that person who knows the most about a language lab, not necessarily the ranking member of the department or administration. Importantly, the decision should be made by those who are going to be using the laboratory.

The initial stages of planning should be concerned with the broad question of how the lab will be used and by whom. Once this issue has been resolved, the details can follow. In selecting equipment careful attention should be paid to functions, convenience and simplicity of operation provided; however, details of electronic specifications are, for the most part, best left in the hands of experts. What good does it do to try to master the complexities of electronics, to worry about the "cps's," "ohms," "flutter," "impedance," when after the installation of the equipment there is hardly a mention of these technical details? It seems safe to say that one will get the proper specifications when dealing with a reputable company with a respected, time-honored name. The committee should turn its attention to questions such as where the lab will be housed, how it can be used most effectively, on what basis it will operate, the number of program sources, will it be a full lab, audio active, passive, both types?

The preceding are meant to be general comments and considerations as well as broad hints. They are not intended to give a total view of all the possible problems encountered in establishing a lab. They will not answer all questions, especially those of a specific or technical nature. However, following the suggestions should help avoid some time-consuming and costly mistakes and help make for a successful start toward establishing an efficient and functioning laboratory.